

**Public Testimony to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Conservation & Development on Governor's  
Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustment, H.B. 5037  
from the International Festival of Arts & Ideas  
Wednesday, February 16, 2022**

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Shelley Quiala, I am the Executive Director of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas and I am here to make the case that public support for the arts and for arts organizations are wise investments for the State of Connecticut because they pay back in dividends.

First of all, I want to thank you. Since the founding of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas in 1996, our partnership with the State of Connecticut has touched millions of lives, has connected people and communities through cultural expression, and has brought resources – financial and otherwise – into New Haven and to our State. We are thankful to see that state funding for the arts remained secure in the Governor's Proposed Budget. I am also grateful for the state legislature's ongoing support. And I want to share information about Arts & Ideas' impact is made possible through this funding. The economic results are well documented and quantifiable.

The Arts, and the Festival, are good for economic growth. Despite hosting our last two Festivals in pandemic years, we had a local economic impact of \$1.5 million in 2021 alone. We welcomed 136,000+ attendees, 14,000+ of which were in-person last year. We had visitors from every region of Connecticut and were viewed online nationally and internationally in 10+ countries and 12 States across the Country. In a survey we conducted this year, more than 40% of respondents said they were introduced to a local restaurant or organization that was new to them; proof that the Festival's impact extends beyond its programming. In a time when many of our peers around the country were reducing staffing, the Arts & Ideas doubled down on our commitment to equitable employment. We increased our year-round staffing by about 30 percent, benchmarked wages and make wage bands public on all job postings and increased the racial diversity of our year-round staff significantly – from 15% two years ago to now nearly 60%.

The arts are essential community-builders and lead the way for a reconnection with community as we emerge from the pandemic. The Arts & Ideas Festival helped usher in a return to live performing arts for many in our community. In our yearly survey, more than 50% of audience members listed our 2021 Festival as their first in-person performance of the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly every evening on the Green sold out on preshow reservations.

The Arts & Ideas Festival is also a driver of learning and innovation and a partner in neighborhood growth. Through the Arts & Ideas High School Fellowship Program, produced in partnership with Gateway Community College, we have welcomed nearly 20 public school sophomores and Juniors every year for an intensive, semester-long course that develops their critical thinking, writing skills and introduces them to the inner-workings of the non-profit arts industry. Nearly 200 students have experienced this program over 10 years, many of them earning college credit.

This year we begin our celebration in May through co-created neighborhood Festival celebrations in five New Haven communities as we lead up to a full Festival offering in 2023 that culminates on June 26. We imagine economic impact numbers and attendance numbers that match our 2019 numbers -- of more than 150,000 people and more than \$9.2 million in economic impact – over the course of this year's Festival.

The arts ecosystem in Connecticut is rich and robust and we are grateful to be a part of it. We are also proud of the unique way that the International Festival of Arts & Ideas contributes to our state's cultural vitality. We are one of the only institutions of our kind in the world that offers such a breadth and depth of programming free-of-cost, ensuring that every person in Connecticut who has the desire to attend will be welcomed without an economic barrier. Because more than 85% of our performances and activities are free to the community, we depend on both public and private funding. The State of Connecticut's support provides the foundation of this critical infrastructure that ensures the year-long strength of our organization.

On behalf of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, I sincerely thank you for your past years of support and congratulate the legislature on the results we generated together for our State. We are looking forward to a future of abundant arts engagement for all our Connecticut communities.

Sincerely,

Shelley Quiala

Executive Director, International Festival of Arts & Ideas